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ABSTRACT

Conducted at the University of Hawaii in 1997, this study examined the satisfaction level of employers who hired graduates from business education and office skills programs. Since Hawaii's economic focus has changed from agriculture to service-oriented tourism, a large number of employees with generic business skills have become necessary. Employers of graduates, or those receiving training in the general area of business, were the target of this survey. Specifically, participants were personnel directors or supervisors who were most likely to hire persons with business education and office skills. Chart 1 lists the 50 firms, organizations, and agencies that participated in the study. While many organizations interviewed had not recently hired many graduates or participants of such programs (due to the 7-year economic slump Hawaii state has experienced), all were knowledgeable about essential business and office skills. Some firms reported being flooded by applicants for entry-level jobs. A few organizations said they looked at as many as 50 applications before filling a single position. Most firms reported an annual turnover of less than 20% (state unemployment during the survey period was at about 6.2%). Statistics throughout the document assess employment data for base-year employment, job openings, economic growth, and satisfaction ratings. Appended are respondents' comments regarding high school and community college hires. (Contains 24 data tables.) (AS)

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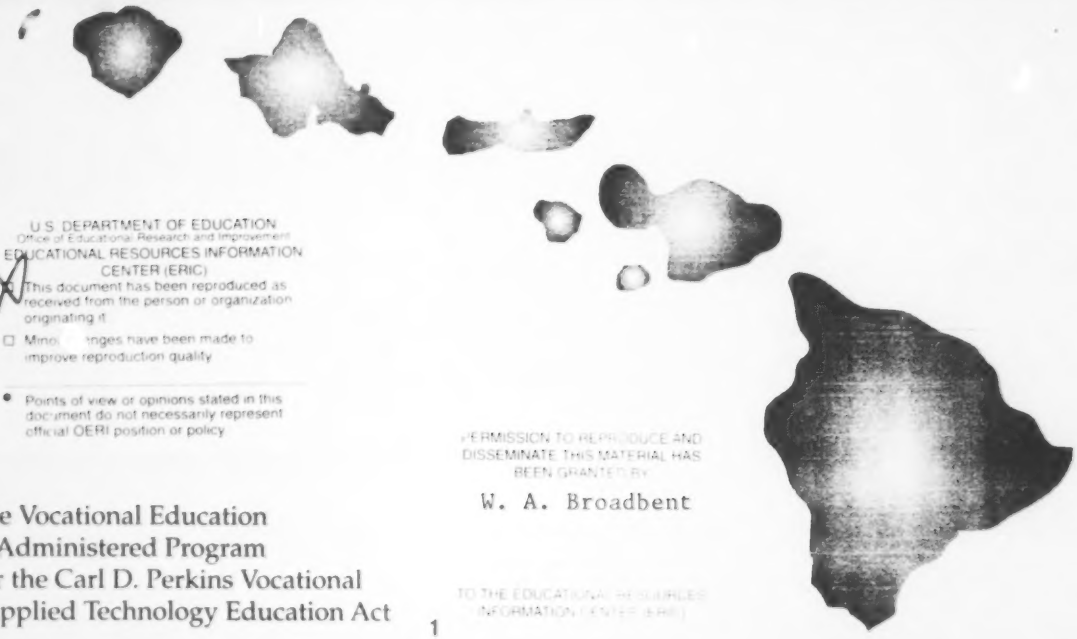

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Employer Perceptions of Graduates from Hawai'i Business Education and Office Skills Programs

William A. Broadbent

December, 1997

Office of the State Director for Vocational Education
State Board for Vocational Education
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Introduction

To participate in the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act federal assistance program, a state must achieve a degree of accountability in the use of such funds. This accountability requirement is primarily met by the *Annual Performance Report*. Included in this annual report is an extensive description of the vocational-technical program improvement activities conducted by the Department of Education, the University of Hawai'i Community Colleges, Department of Public Safety, and other eligible recipients of the Perkins funds.

In addition to preparing the *Annual Performance Report*, the Office of the State Director for Vocational Education (OSDVE) surveys employers on a routine basis to determine the extent to which employers are satisfied with the vocational education graduates they hire. Such studies have been conducted by OSDVE on a recurrent basis since 1984. The employer target group varies from one study to the next. These studies are not conducted on an annual basis as to avoid an inordinate intrusion on the business community. The last study was done in 1994 and focused on the state's leading industry, tourism.

The focus of this study was directed at the programs that tend to be most dominant in terms of enrollments and placement. These programs include business-related subjects and office skills training. While many people tend to associate "vocational education" with wood shops and mechanical studies, over half of the students enrolled in occupational oriented programs are involved in learning about business subjects or office skills. These include computer programming, computer operations, secretarial subjects, systems analysis, accounting related activities and entry level management skills. Many of these career lines involve intense technical preparation and broad general knowledge.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which employers who hire graduates from business education and office skills programs are satisfied with the level of preparedness of these former vocational education students. As a result of this study, it is hoped that implications for program improvement would emerge for consideration by those institutions that offer business education and office skills programs.

Significance of the Study

For the first part of the twentieth century, Hawai'i's economy was dominated by agriculture. Sugar and pineapple production were the principal sources of the gross state product. Plantation owners tended to be resentful of young people who aspired to "office jobs." What they required was a large workforce of people with strong backs and a willingness to endure long hours of hot, physical labor. With the rise of tourism and other service-oriented jobs, persons with technical business skills became more valued.

Today, Hawai'i's economy is predominately "service oriented." To support such industries as tourism, a large number of people with generic business skills are necessary. These involve such things as accounting, secretarial, and information management skills. In Hawai'i, these areas are the focus of the majority of vocational offerings. Employers of graduates or those receiving some instruction in the general area of business were the target of this "employer satisfaction survey."

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to the perceptions of a non-random sample of employers. Given limited financial resources available for this study, the research was exploratory and non-experimental. Consequently, cause-and-effect inferences are not tenable. Likewise, resource constraints precluded the inclusion of neighbor island businesses.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design utilized in this study is classified as qualitative descriptive research. Interviews were conducted using a combination of structured and unstructured questions.

Qualitative studies such as this one, while they tend to lack generality across the entire target population, can provide in-depth and useful information that would be difficult to obtain through other research methodologies. The interview questions were designed so that employers could express their heartfelt opinion on the subject. Participants were given freedom to go beyond simple responses to the questions. The interviewer was allowed to elaborate on the questions to further explain their meaning. The only constraints surrounding the interviews were the respective time constraints of the persons being interviewed.

Subject Selection

Participants of this study were personnel directors or supervisors who were most likely to hire persons with business education/office practice skills. Employers were selected from three sources of information. First, the State Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR) provided a list of economic enterprises that are most likely to hire persons with business education/office skills. Many of the firms identified by DLIR tended to have relatively small administrative units and could be characterized, for the most part, as small firms.

Second, the largest firms in the State were identified. These included the major banks and public utilities. The third source of information came from the major community colleges on O'ahu that

offer business education or office skills subjects. These colleges provided the names of firms that they knew had hired their graduates.

Chart 1 lists the firms, agencies, and/or organizations included in this study. Although no neighbor island businesses were included in the study, it is important to note that approximately 83 percent of the State's population reside on O'ahu. From each of the businesses listed, an appropriate personnel director or supervisor was identified and asked to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

The interview instrument was designed by the researcher and was field tested for clarity and utility.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted during 1997. All interviews were conducted by the researcher. All interviews were conducted at the place of business of each employer. Interviews lasted from 20 minutes to three hours, depending upon participant schedule and eagerness to express in-depth opinions on the subject. The interviewer took detailed notes of all relevant information provided by the participants in response to the interview questions. No audio or video recordings were taken.

Analysis of Data

The businesses that participated in the study are listed in alphabetical order in Chart 1. Since data were intentionally aggregated to help ensure confidentiality of the respondents, it is inappropriate to draw conclusions on how a particular firm responded.

Descriptive statistics that included frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency were used to organize and summarize the data.

Chart 1 Firms, Organizations, & Agencies Participating in the Business Education Employer Satisfaction Survey

A.C. Dung Construction Company
Allstate Insurance Company
Aloha Airlines
American Arbitration Association
American Savings Bank
AMFAC
Architects Hawai'i Ltd.
Bank of Hawai'i
Bishop Insurance of Hawai'i Inc.
Castle & Cooke Hawai'i
Central Pacific Bank
City and County of Honolulu
Clifford Projects Inc.
Daiei (USA) Inc.
Federal Bureau of Investigation
First Hawaiian Bank
Foodland Supermarkets Ltd.
Girl Scout Council of Hawai'i
GTE Hawaiian Telephone Co.
Hawai'i Medical Services Association (HMSA)
Hawai'i Protective Association
Hawai'i State Hospital
Hawaiian Electric Industry Inc. (HEI)
Ilikai Hotel
Kaiser Permanente
Kamehameha Schools
Bernice Pauahi Bishop Estate
Large local restaurant chain
Proprietor desires anonymity
Liberty House
Manpower
Matson Navigation Company
Metropolitan Life Insurance Company
MicroAge Computer Centers
Mutual of Omaha Insurance Company
New England Mutual Life
Northwest Airlines
Oceanic Communications
Pacific Guardian Life
Pacifico Creative Services, Inc.
PCE Environmental
Queen's Medical Center
Roberts Hawai'i Tours
Sears Roebuck and Company
Servco Pacific
Sony Hawai'i Company
State of Hawai'i
Straub Clinic and Hospital Inc.
Times Supermarkets Ltd.
Trecker & Fritz
Attorneys At Law
Waikiki Trader Corp.
Windward Insurance Center

Findings

Many of the firms contacted had not hired many graduates or participants of such programs recently. In fact, most firms had not done much hiring at all. This may be due to the prolonged seven year economic slump this state has experienced. However, all of those contacted for interview were knowledgeable about business and office skills.

Some firms having reputations for good salaries, favorable employee benefits, and reasonable employment security reported being besieged by a flood of applicants for "entry level jobs." A few organizations reported they looked at as many as fifty applications before filling a single position. They then interviewed between three to eight applicants (the mode being five) before hiring one person for a probationary position.

Turnover in most firms had reportedly dropped in the last few years as opportunities for vertical and horizontal movement became more difficult to find. Most firms reported an annual turnover of less than 20% with some reporting almost no turnover at all. It must be remembered that the state unemployment rate during the period in which the survey was conducted was at about 6.2%. This was significantly higher than the national average. However, it was much lower than many industrialized, European countries. Employers had more difficulty finding skilled people or persons with management potential.

According to Pat Stanley of the Hawai'i Occupational Information Coordinating Center, the prospects awaiting the 1997–1998 business education participant are not terribly exciting. The data in Chart 2.1–2.4 were generated from the Research Unit of the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations and based on a historical or linear model.

Chart 2.1 Employment Outlook for Selected Industries and Occupations

Matrix Code	Occupation Title	1994 Base Year Employment	2005 Projected Employment	Average Annual Openings	Total Job Openings	Openings Due to Growth	Openings Due to Separation
215020041	Claims Takers, Unemployment Benefits	190	210	5	59	17	42
251050258	Computer Programmers	950	1,070	34	373	127	246
251080257	Computer Programmer Aides	430	460	13	143	32	111
283050260	Paralegals	670	820	17	183	148	35
283080263	Title Searchers	160	180	2	27	19	8
283990267	All Other Legal Assistants	390	420	5	52	32	20
430080282	Sales Agents, Real Estate	270	310	8	89	42	47
430210285	Travel Agents	1,150	1,390	42	467	237	230
430230290	Sales Agents, Advertising	440	480	11	119	44	75
430990287	All Other Service Sales Occupations	280	320	12	135	38	97
490110283	Salespersons, Retail	20,540	23,400	902	9,925	2,853	7,072
490140293	Salespersons, Parts	930	1,010	34	378	76	302
490170276	Counter and Rental Clerks	2,290	2,790	89	974	508	466
490210344	Stock Clerks, Sales Floor	4,340	4,890	145	1,596	550	1,046
490230275	Cashiers	14,690	16,870	744	8,182	2,171	6,011
490260295	Vendors, Solicitors, Door-To-Door	400	460	16	181	63	118
490320288	Demonstrators, Promoters, Models	190	220	9	102	31	71
499990296	All Other Sales & Related Occupations	2,130	2,410	97	1,067	280	787
531050324	New Accounts Clerks	420	440	14	150	19	131

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Chart 2.2 Employment Outlook for Selected Industries and Occupations

Matrix Code	Occupation Title	1994 Base Year Employment	2005 Projected Employment	Average Annual Openings	Total Job Openings	Openings Due to Growth	Openings Due to Separation
531080394	Transit Clerks	20	20	1	10	1	9
531170385	Credit Checkers	90	100	2	20	13	7
531210386	Loan and Credit Clerks	3,220	3,430	58	638	209	429
531230299	Adjustment Clerks	890	1,000	16	177	107	70
531260365	Statement Clerks	80	90	2	25	4	21
531280354	Brokerage Clerks	120	120	3	38	6	32
533080308	Insurance Examining Clerks	60	60	2	22	6	16
533110303	Insurance Claims Clerks	260	300	5	57	39	18
535020305	Welfare Eligibility Workers	580	630	13	139	52	87
535050405	Investigators, Clerical	10	10	0	3	2	1
535080300	Bill & Account Collectors	700	790	14	155	88	67
537020382	Counter Clerks	420	460	6	67	38	29
537050397	Municipal Clerks	10	10	0	2	1	1
537080309	License Clerks	110	120	2	20	12	8
538020328	Travel Clerks	1,120	1,350	41	450	226	224
538050327	Reservation & Transportation Ticket Agents	2,200	2,610	77	845	405	440
538080322	Hotel, Desk Clerks	1,760	2,160	96	1,052	400	652
539080353	Advertising Clerks	70	70	2	18	2	16
539140399	Real Estate Clerks	190	220	6	63	27	36
551020368	Legal Secretaries	1,290	1,620	58	634	326	308

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Chart 2.3 Employment Outlook for Selected Industries and Occupations

Matrix Code	Occupation Title	1994 Base Year Employment	2005 Projected Employment	Average Annual Openings	Total Job Openings	Openings Due to Growth	Openings Due to Separation
551050369	Medical Secretaries	630	810	30	329	179	150
553020374	Stenographers	1,330	1,490	43	474	157	317
553050325	Receptionists, Information Clerks	4,780	5,720	159	1,753	938	815
553070377	Typists, Including Word Processing	4,420	4,910	118	1,302	490	812
553140364	Personnel Clerks, except Payroll	1,080	1,180	26	286	103	183
553170355	Correspondence Clerks	30	30	1	7	0	7
553210356	File Clerks	830	980	44	483	152	331
553230363	Order Clerks: Materials, Service	1,050	1,160	32	354	117	237
553260341	Procurement Clerks	250	260	7	77	17	60
553280400	Statistical Clerks	210	260	7	75	41	34
553320323	Interviewing Clerks, excluding Personnel	570	650	23	256	79	177
553350388	Customer Service Reps., Utilities	500	560	16	171	58	113
553380360	Bookkeeping & Account & Auditing	10,340	11,770	319	3,509	1,428	2,081
553410361	Payroll and Timekeeping Clerks	690	760	24	261	76	185
553440358	Billing, Cost and Rate Clerks	1,640	1,930	71	784	293	491
553470396	General Office Clerks	14,420	16,520	438	4,820	2,108	2,712
560020359	Bill, Post, Calculate Machine Operators	580	660	29	319	81	238
560050392	Duplicating Machine Operators	160	190	9	95	26	69
560080393	Mail Machine Operators	120	130	5	60	8	52
560110319	Computer Operators, exclud. Peripherals	1,030	1,150	37	405	117	288

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Chart 2.4 Employment Outlook for Selected Industries and Occupations

Matrix Code	Occupation Title	1994 Base Year Employment	2005 Projected Employment	Average Annual Openings	Total Job Openings	Openings Due to Growth	Openings Due to Separation
560140320	Peripheral EDP Equipment Operators	300	330	11	118	34	84
560170389	Data Entry Keyers, excluding Composing	1,480	1,690	30	332	215	117
560210390	Data Entry Keyers, Composing	150	180	3	35	23	12
560990395	All Other Office Machine Operators	170	180	8	89	16	73
571020314	Switchboard Operators	1,130	1,350	49	541	220	321
571080312	Central Office Operators	340	380	12	137	41	96
571110316	Telegraph and Teletype Operators	20	20	1	7	1	6
571990317	All Other Communication Operators	70	70	2	21	1	20
573020330	Mail Clerks, excluding Mail Machine	400	430	15	161	25	136
580020336	Dispatcher: Police, Fire, Ambulance	220	240	5	55	22	33
580050337	Dispatcher: excl. Police, Fire, Ambulance	900	970	19	205	70	135
580080342	Production, Expediting Clerks	480	530	14	153	44	109
580110350	Transportation Agents	1,290	1,550	47	512	259	253
580210349	Marking Clerks	60	80	2	24	11	13
580230345	Stock Clerks: Stockroom or Warehouse	3,800	4,220	121	1,333	418	915
580260340	Order Fillers, Sales	760	840	23	255	84	171
580280346	Traffic, Shipping, & Receiving Clerks	2,370	2,610	51	566	240	326
580990351	All Other Material Workers	280	310	8	88	28	60

*Source: Harada, Naomi, et. al., *Employment Outlook for Industries and Occupations: 1994–2005* (Honolulu: Hawai'i Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, August, 1996).

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Profile of Firms Contacted

The firms were organized by industrial classification criteria. Some had a single focus such as food retailing. Others fit into two or more categories (e.g. retail and wholesale). The three largest groupings were in "retailing," "finance/insurance/real estate," and "service" (Table 1).

Table 1 Classification of Firms Represented

Type of Firm	N
Agriculture/fisheries	0
Construction	1
Finance/ insurance/ real estate	23
Manufacturing	0
Retail trade	10
Service	20
Transportation	5
Wholesale	2
Other (architecture, communications, & non-profit)	2

* Some firms were diverse in nature providing a variety of goods and services. The data are, as a consequence, non-interval in nature. In other words, one firm or agency may be listed in two or more categories.

The great majority of the job entry level positions in these industries were low skilled and low paying. Tellers in banks and other financial institutions are relatively poorly paid although the skill level and responsibility may be substantial. Many of these "job entry" positions have limited career ladders. There are relatively few opportunities for advancement unless one uses such positions as a springboard to obtain additional training.

All of the firms contacted had their main office, often their headquarters, located in the City and County of Honolulu, which includes the entire island of O'ahu (Table 2). A few were headquartered on the mainland. For instance, United Airlines reports that all decisions and significant initiatives come out of Chicago. Most other national and international carriers also have their headquarters on the mainland. The bright spot is Continental Airlines, where a decision has been made to make Honolulu a "hub" for regional administration and maintenance for the airline and its subsidiary, Air Micronesia.

Table 2 Geographic Site of Operations

County	N
Honolulu (O'ahu)	50
Hawai'i (Big Island)	27
Kaua'i	22
Maui	23

* Some companies had operations in two or more counties.

Twenty-seven firms had offices or operations on the Big Island or Hawai'i. Maui and Kaua'i counties were close behind with 23 and 22 respectively.

Almost 90% of the firms said they had employed persons who had taken one or more business subjects in high school (Table 3).

Table 3 Firms with Employees Who Had Taken Business Education Courses in High School

Response	N	%
Firms with	44	88
Firms without	3	6
Firms that didn't know	3	6
Total	50	100

The largest area of training for successful applicants was in the area of secretarial subjects (Table 4).

Table 4 Business Education Areas Represented in Pre-Service Training of Successful Applicants

Business Area	N
Accounting	32
Secretarial (Office Administration and Technology Specialists)	37
Computer Operator/ Programmer	32
Entry Level Management Skills	16
Marketing	15
Don't know	7

*The data are non-interval in nature. Some successful applicants may have trained in two or more areas. Some firms may have hired specialists in two or more areas. Almost all secretaries engage in activities that involve the use of personal computers.

More and more persons at lower and middle management positions have been induced to do their own rough typing, rely on e-mail for correspondence, and use the Internet for the purchase of travel services. Few secretaries take or are required to take shorthand any more. Job opportunities in this area may decline as the result of developments in electronic technology and the persistent tendencies of many companies to equate greater productivity with "down-sizing" or "right-sizing."

One of the major foci of the survey was to determine how well the high schools and community colleges are doing in the area of training persons in business or office related skills. The principal investigator, who personally conducted all interviews, tried to get the respondents to focus on persons trained in business subjects who had been hired with a high school education. However, he suspects that the responses of most participants had a much broader focus. Many appeared to be evaluating the job being done in the high schools as a whole and in all areas.

Over half of the respondents stated that the public high schools were doing a "fair" or "good" job of preparing people for the world of business (Table 5). Eighteen percent had "no opinion." The "no opinion" responses tended to come from foreign owned companies that were perhaps trying to avoid controversy. The 18% of the participants

Table 5 Adequacy of Employment Preparation of High School Hires

Assessment	N	%
Good	8	16
Fair	28	56
Poor	9	18
No opinion	5	10
Non-applicable	—	—
Total	50	100

who gave "poor" ratings tended to be from the first source list. You will remember that this portion of the sample was drawn from types of firms that the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations believe are most likely to hire persons with office skills training. These firms tended to be small in terms of total employees on payroll. This cannot be determined from an assessment of the aggregated data as they are presented herein.

The critical question in the survey involved an assessment as to whether, all other things being equal, applicants with relevant business skills training were preferable to those without such pre-service training. The overwhelming response was "yes" (Table 6). Respondents frequently elaborated on their response on this item. They said, for the most part, that they not only wanted new employees who were sound in the basics, but also had fundamental and sound mastery of the technical skill or skills they were seeking.

Table 6 Comparison of New Employees Having Business Education in High School and Those Without This Experience

Assessment	N	%
No basis for comparison	17	14
Prefer vocational/ technical	41	82
Vocational/ technical education of no consequence	1	2
No opinion	1	2
Total	50	100

All organizations have some sort of orientation for new hires. This may take no more than a half of an hour or as long as two weeks or more. However, the primary purpose of this in-house orientation is to imbue new hires with the organization's philosophy and particular way of doing things in their particular office setting. They don't expect to

teach someone hired in accounting the fundamentals of bookkeeping. They expect them to know these techniques and be familiar with the procedures. This training, they feel, is the function of the school. A positive attitude is good and a desire to work appreciated, but they basically want someone who can make a contribution at the earliest possible moment. Relevant skills training is essential particularly for smaller firms.

Only one respondent answered that prior training made no difference to him. However, the typical employee he hired was not hired to perform a skilled task.

Respondents were next asked to evaluate "high school hires" with a business education background against nine criteria which have emerged as being most relevant over the last few years of such surveys (Table 7). The first item, and among the most relevant, involved "technical knowledge." In other words, if an applicant advertised himself or herself as being a competent computer operator, was that individual projecting a correct description of his or her real competence in this area or not? Over 75% of the respondents reported that the demonstrated skills were "adequate" or better. Twenty-six percent said that the technical knowledge was "good" and 4% felt they warranted a "very good" assessment (Table 7).

It is important to note that there has been a good deal of discussion about young workers' "attitudes" and "interpersonal skills." For example, Lex Brodie, a prominent small businessperson in the community, recently conducted a survey of businesses regarding the importance of positive work attitudes and interpersonal skills. His instrument may have had been organized in such a way as to induce a degree of bias towards the reported outcomes. However, the study is relevant and useful. Brodie found that most employers want employees who can get along and are positive in their work environment. They want schools to teach these attitudes and skills. (Refer to the article by Malia Zimmerman, "Lack of Social Skills Hinders Success of Future Workforce," *Pacific Business News Supplement*, July 28, 1997, p. 16.)

There is a good deal of psychological and sociological research which indicates that the proclivity for these traits is a learned behavior. This learned behavior takes place relatively early in life. Socialization in these areas is usually assumed to be the primary responsibility of family, peers, and the immediate community. Nevertheless, schools and colleges can assist in the reinforcement and or acquisition of these personality characteristics and traits.

Table 7 General Evaluation of Business Education: High School Graduates Recently Employed

Criterion	Very Poor 1 N	Very Poor 1 H%	Poor 2 N	Poor 2 H%	Neutral 3 N	Neutral 3 H%	Good 4 N	Good 4 H%	Very Good 5 N	Very Good 5 H%	No Opinion NA N	No Opinion NA H%	Total N	Total %	Mean	Mode	Range
Technical knowledge	1	2	5	10	25	50	13	26	2	4	4	8	50	100	3.5	3	1–5
Work attitude	1	2	13	26	20	40	12	24	2	4	2	4	50	100	3.0	3	1–5
Work quality	1	2	4	8	26	52	17	34	1	2	1	2	50	100	3.2	3	1–5
Written communication skills	3	6	31	62	10	20	3	9	1	2	2	4	50	100	2.3	2	1–5
Oral communication skills	2	4	20	40	15	30	9	18	1	2	3	6	50	100	2.5	2	1–5
Safety consciousness	0	0	7	14	22	44	16	32	3	6	2	4	50	100	3.5	3	2–5
Dependability	0	0	7	14	20	40	20	40	2	4	1	2	50	100	3.3	3	2–5
Adaptability	1	2	6	12	17	34	18	36	4	8	4	8	50	100	3.4	3	1–5
Motivation	1	2	5	10	17	34	18	36	8	16	1	2	50	100	3.6	3	1–5
Overall rating	0	0	1	2	36	72	10	20	1	2	2	4	50	100	3.2	3	2–5

In this survey, respondents were asked if successful applicants were adequate in the area of projecting positive work attitudes. Twenty-four percent of the samples found graduates "good" in this respect, and 4% found new high school hires to be "very good" in this area (Table 7). When the principal investigator followed up with a query asking if the successful applicants' positive attitudes persisted in their every day behavior, the respondents were likely to say that they did. This conclusion was achieved through frequent contacts with supervisors to whom new employees were assigned.

The third criterion involved "work quality." This was not defined as "never makes mistakes," but as "learns through infrequent mistakes." The personnel or human resource technicians were asked if they felt that they had filtered out those who might be inclined to be consistently mistake prone. Over one-third of the respondents reported that successful applicants were "good" in this perspective. One even claimed that new hires, with no more than a high school education in office subjects, were "very good." Only five respondents found new employees, educated for work primarily at the high school level, below par on this criterion (Table 7). Employees right out of high school were considered to be more proficient in the area of computer applications then older employees.

Throughout the years that this survey has been undertaken, "written communication skill" has persistently gotten the lowest average ratings both at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Some employers even criticized the writing abilities and ability to assimilate written information of four year college graduates. Over two-thirds of the employer participants found products of local high schools to be "poor" or "very poor" on this criterion. Only 20% gave them a neutral rating, 9% "good" and 2% a "very good" rating (Table 7). One human resource specialist in the health services profession said that lack of writing skills was the single most important factor in persons not being promoted to management.

"Oral communications" did almost as poorly among personnel and human resource specialists. The staff administrators interviewed said that applicants were frequently unable to explain their views or articulate their understanding of a concept or problem. Almost half of those consulted in the survey rated products of the public schools as either "poor" or "very poor" with this respect. Many applicants were reported to have difficulty establishing eye contact. Some employees evidently have difficulty explaining something to a peer or superior.

Thirty percent of the sample awarded an "adequate" or "neutral" rating and only 18% a "good" rating (Table 7).

There may be some cultural factors involved here. Hawai'i is composed of a collage of many cultures. Some of these view direct eye contact or assertiveness as being impolite or confrontational. In most modern businesses there must be some degree of confrontation from time to time. A firm handshake and "looking a person straight in the eye" is believed to be important in the business culture in which we operate. Some employers felt that students need to appraise the cultural context in which an exchange of greetings or a transaction is taking place and make appropriate accommodations (Table 7).

"Safety consciousness" is considered an attribute in almost all industries. The welfare of the employees, their continued productivity, and their sensitivity to company liability in case of accidents involving a patron or client are of paramount concerns. A business office is not considered as dangerous a work setting as working in a coal mine. However, there are elements of danger in all employment. Failure to secure loose cords, poorly balanced file cabinets, and failure to heed manufacturers warnings while adjusting electrical equipment all pose unnecessary threats.

Over 80% of the specialists consulted rated high school hires as either being "adequate," "good," or "very good" on "safety consciousness" (Table 7). Only about one in five thought the safety performance of persons hired with a basic high school education was "poor." No participant in the survey thought it was "very poor."

"Dependability" is considered a critical virtue in such industries as food service and health care. In business, it is not as critical, but is important. If an essential report fails to get out on time because of poor work habits of the staff, the organization or agency suffers. It's important for people to come to work with some regularity so that employers will know when they are available for discussions or to receive directions.

On the "dependability" criterion, high school hires did rather well. Eighty-four percent of the participants in the sample gave this group of employees "neutral" or higher ratings (Table 7).

"Adaptability" is also a valued characteristic in a modern economy. Twenty years ago, a person entering the job market could look forward to a change in jobs no more than about five times. Today a change of jobs is likely to take place seven times or more. Even if a person stays

with the same company or agency throughout his working career, the nature of his or her job, or the job itself is likely to change. Advances in technology and the equipment used change very rapidly. Twenty-five years ago, some new office employees were assigned to work with manual or primitive electric typewriters. Now many work with the most sophisticated computers and communications equipment. The person who does not adjust is likely to lose a good deal of their job mobility.

Industry also needs people who are amenable to crosstraining. As the size of many offices shrink due to electronic automation, a person who can fill in to perform a colleague's tasks is valued. Versatility is a key factor in employee recognition and promotion on the basis of merit.

Today's high school graduates are perhaps more amenable to change and innovation than many of their more senior workers. Many have been exposed to electronic games and computers since childhood. Some even have demonstrated skills at programming and electronic and software trouble shooting. In this respect, they may have an advantage over their senior associates who grew up in industry when change and innovation came more slowly and predictably.

The highest rating on "adaptability" listed by employers was "good." Thirty-six percent of the respondents thought high school hires, particularly recent hires, were "good" in this respect, and another 8% felt this new group of employees rated a "very good" assessment. Less than one in four provided a rating that could be considered negative (Table 7).

"Motivation," in many departments, is considered a critical factor. This is particularly true in such areas as sales, marketing, and promotions. Motivation and a desire to identify and stay with the organization are also definitions of this term. Eighty-six percent of the participants in the survey gave new hires, who had received their pre-service training primarily in high school, a "neutral" or better rating on this criterion (Table 7). Only about 12% felt the high school trained group was lacking in this area.

The "overall" assessments tended to moderate and cluster around the center of the rating scale. Frequently, respondents wanted to award a 3 plus or a 4 minus. The interviewer tended to make a decision on the basis of a review of the central tendency of the nine prior ratings. In other words, if a respondent wanted to assign an overall rating of "4" minus or good, and most of his or her ratings had been "3" or below, their response was usually coded as a "3." The central tendency

was a "3" or adequate rating. Almost three-fourths of those participating in the survey gave the high school hires such a rating (Table 7). Only one respondent gave the high schools a "poor" rating, which was consistent with his other assessment, and no one indicated a "very poor" assessment.

The assessment criterion receiving the highest marks, for what we have termed "high school hires," was "motivation." Those making the ratings gave this attribute a mean (average) score of 3.6. The criterion of "safety consciousness" was not far behind with a mean score of 3.5. "Adaptability" finished a close third with a mean rating of 3.4. As one might predict, the lowest average rating went to "written communication skills," with a dismal showing of 2.3. This has not shown substantial improvement, if any, in the last fifteen years. However, maybe employer expectations have increased while some qualitative improvement in the product has actually occurred. However, S.A.T. scores don't seem to warrant such an optimistic supposition. The other criterion receiving below avenge ratings was "oral communication skills."

It has previously been mentioned that culture may play a role in this finding on "oral communication skills." Being deferential and avoiding eye contact may be an encouraged behavior in some sub-cultures in Hawai'i. However, one must know when what behavior is deemed appropriate in any given situation. Few of us ever achieve this flexibility completely. "Safety consciousness," "dependability," and the "overall rating" tended to escape any "very poor" scores.

The mode or rating option which garnered the greatest number of responses was "good," and was recorded in 3 of the 10 criteria." The ranking of assessment criteria from high to low, using the mean as the point of reference, are provided in Chart 3.

The human resource specialists were then asked if they had employees who had been exposed to the seven public community colleges prior to, or during their employment. Ninety-four percent reported that they did, in fact, have such persons on their present payrolls (Table 8). This indicates that a large number of persons seeking employment or advancement may utilize the community colleges in this area. A number volunteered the fact that many of those in their offices had attended a private business school such as Heald Business College, Denver Business College, or Honolulu Business College.

Chart 3 Criteria Listed in Rank Order by Mean for High School Hires: Highest to Lowest

Criteria	$\bar{X}$	Rank Order
Motivation	3.6	1
Safety consciousness	3.5	2
Adaptability	3.4	3
Dependability	3.3	4
Technical knowledge	3.2	5
Work attitude	3.2	5
Work quality	3.2	5
Overall rating	3.2	6
Oral communication skills	2.5	7
Written communication skills	2.3	8

Table 8 Firms with Employees Who Have Community College Business Education Backgrounds

Response	N	%
Firms with	47	94
Firms without	2	4
Firms that didn't know	1	2
Total	50	100

There are numerous options in the general curricula labeled business education or business administration by the public community colleges. Some colleges offer more than others. One recently approved certificate program is that in "Entrepreneurship." This program is offered at Kapi'olani Community College. Most course work involves accounting/bookkeeping procedures, office administration and technology, marketing, and a preliminary understanding of the skills for entry level management. Each college is organized in a slightly different manner in accordance with enrollment demand, and the strengths of the faculty. However, there is a broad area of curricular overlap and a high degree of comparability. A student should have little difficulty in transferring from one college to another if need be.

The area of specific skills training that most human resource specialists reported in the training of their employees (both pre-service and in-service) was in secretarial subjects. Thirty-four of the human resource officers said they had in their employ persons with training in this area (Table 9).

Table 9 Business Education Areas Represented in Pre-Service Training of Successful Applicants: Both Private and Public Were Considered

Business Area	N
Accounting	33
Secretarial (Office Administration and Technology Specialist	34
Computer Operators/Programmers	28
Entry Level Management Skills	22
Marketing	14
Other (Legal Assisting, Electronics, Nursing, Food Service	4
Don't know	3

The next most frequently mentioned area was subject matter dealing with accounting and bookkeeping. Thirty-three of the employers said they had people in their firms with training obtained from the community college in this subject area. It should be mentioned that there is some semantic confusion between "accounting" functions and those of "bookkeeping." Generally, accounting refers to the full area of control and fiduciary responsibility which includes audit and internal controls. Bookkeeping refers essentially to the recording and affirmation of the actions taken by accountants.

One option made interpretation somewhat hard to discern. Twenty-eight of the respondents claimed that the people with some community college experience were trained mainly in computer operations. Probably all of the applicants, with recent community college experience in business subjects, had been trained in computer operations. Many of the respondents' secretaries or accounting clerks may have returned to college to either develop or improve their computer skills. Most business subjects today require some operating knowledge of personal computers. In any case, 28 of the respondents said the training of their people had been primarily in the use of computers.

Twenty-two of the human resource specialists believed that applicants hired with a community college background had taken courses involving "entry level management skills," and 14% believed that they had employees on staff that were exposed to course work having "retail" or "wholesale" content (Table 9). Among the four respondents answering "other," half responded that their people had experienced "legal assisting" training at the community college level. Three personnel specialists were unsure of the training backgrounds of their recent hires.

The next twelve items of the survey were designed to provide some degree of appropriately qualified summative evaluation. They are similar to the items addressed to an assessment of the secondary or high school program. However, no comparative analysis should be attempted for several reasons.

Almost two-thirds of the respondents rated the community colleges function in the preparation of young adults and others for employment as "good." This was the highest possible rating of the four options provided (Table 10). Thirty percent opted for the option "fair." Again, as in the case of the summative assessment used for the secondary schools, the principal investigator believes that those doing the ratings may have been assessing the community colleges as a whole.

Table 10 Adequacy of Employment Preparation of Community College Hires

Assessment	N	%
Good	31	62
Fair	15	30
Poor	2	4
No opinion	2	4
Total	50	100

Anyone associated with the community colleges must be impressed with the results evidenced in Table 11. Over 90% of the human resources specialists and those involved directly with the implementation of personnel procedures gave educators in the business a fine assessment. They would prefer, by a 92% margin, to employ applicants with skills training taken at a community college over others equal in all other respects (Table 11). Only one respondent in fifty felt that skills training at the community college level made little or no difference in their decision to hire. One other had no opinion.

Table 11 Comparison of New Employees Having Business Education at the Community College Level and Those Without Such Experience

Assessment	N	%
Prefer business education preparation	48	96
Business education preparation of no consequence	1	2
No basis for comparison	1	2
Total	50	100

In the area of "technical knowledge," positive assessments predominated. Sixty-four percent of the respondents gave community college hires a "good" rating on this criterion (Table 12). Another 32% thought that products of the community colleges were "adequate" in this area, and 2% gave them a "very good" rating. None of those in the survey provided a "poor" or "very poor" rating.

The response pattern to "work attitude" varied in terms of the nature of the firm. Those firms with strong mainland associations were generally more critical than those that had a strong local character. A good "work attitude" may tend to vary from one cultural context to another. Nevertheless, most respondents were quite positive. Thirty-four percent felt those with community college experience had an "adequate" attitude and 58% felt they warranted a "good" rating (Table 12). Six percent felt community college hires were "very good" on this assessment item and only one respondent felt the general work attitude warranted a "poor" rating in this respect. No one indicated "very poor."

"Work quality" was operationally defined for this study as learning from an occasional mistake. Poor work quality was interpreted as making frequent mistakes of a similar nature and failing to learn from the experience. Almost half of the respondents gave community college hires a "good" rating on this assessment item (Table 12). Another 42% felt the work quality of such hires was "adequate," 8% felt it warranted a "very good" assessment, and only 1 respondent felt it was "poor." None of those in the survey sample felt obliged to render a "very poor" rating.

The area for the greatest concern, as in the case of the "high school hires," was "written communication skills" (Table 12). Twelve percent found the skills in this area "poor," and another 50% simply said the skills were "adequate." Only one respondent felt the skills in this area were "very good" and 6% had "no opinion."

"Oral communication skills" fared only marginally better (Table 12). Twelve percent found these skills to be "poor" in this area and only 38% could award a "good" or "very good" assessment.

On the "safety consciousness" criterion, thirty-six percent felt those being assessed were "adequate" in this area, 42% said they were "good" in this respect, and 8% felt a rating of "very good" was indicated. Six percent said they had "no opinion."

Table 12 General Evaluation of Business Education: Community College Hires Recently Employed

Criterion	Very Poor 1 N	Very Poor 1 H%	Poor 2 N	Poor 2 H%	Neutral 3 N	Neutral 3 H%	Good 4 N	Good 4 H%	Very Good 5 N	Very Good 5 H%	No Opinion NA N	No Opinion NA H%	Total N	Total %	Mean	Mode	Range
Technical knowledge	0	0	0	0	16	32	32	64	1	2	1	2	50	100	3.7	4	3–5
Work attitude	0	0	1	2	17	34	29	58	3	6	0	0	50	100	3.3	4	2–5
Work quality	0	0	1	2	21	42	23	46	4	8	1	2	50	100	3.6	4	2–5
Written communication skills	0	0	6	12	25	50	15	30	1	2	3	6	50	100	3.2	3	2–5
Oral communication skills	0	0	6	12	24	48	17	34	2	4	1	2	50	100	3.3	3	2–5
Safety consciousness	0	0	4	8	18	36	21	42	4	8	3	6	50	100	3.4	4	2–5
Dependability	0	0	3	6	20	40	24	48	2	4	1	2	50	100	3.5	4	2–5
Adaptability	0	0	2	4	17	34	24	48	5	10	2	4	50	100	3.7	4	2–5
Motivation	0	0	0	0	19	38	24	48	5	10	2	4	50	100	3.7	4	3–5
Overall rating	0	0	0	0	26	52	20	40	3	6	1	2	50	100	3.5	3	3–5

Community college products did well on the criterion of "dependability" (Table 12). Only six percent listed a "poor" rating. Forty percent opted for an "adequate" rating. A high forty-eight percent concluded that those with a community college experience deserved a "good" rating, and 4% felt a "very good" designation was suitable.

The "overall" assessment for the attribute of "adaptability" was similar to that observed for "dependability" (Table 12). Only 4% felt that community college hires deserved a "poor" rating. As with the concept of "dependability," no respondent issued a "very poor" evaluative assessment. Nearly half of the study population gave those being evaluated a "good" designation. Another 10% felt a "very good" rating had been earned.

The respondents rated people from the community colleges very favorably in the area of "motivation." Thirty-eight percent found such hires at least "adequate" in this respect, another 48% rated them "good" on this item, and 10% found them "very good." No one rated employees with community college backgrounds as being "poor" or "very poor" (Table 12).

This finding is understandable. Many students have to forego full-time employment to attend college. Many attend only after work, and a good number of those who attend full time have a part-time job on the side. Some have experienced the realities of compensation from a job that requires little skill. In such jobs there is minimal compensation, little control over the work situation, and little room for advancement. A good number have been motivated by the realities of the employment market to place themselves in situations where they achieve a better and more satisfying work style.

The "overall" rating tended towards a centrist position, but leaned towards the high end of the scale (Table 12). Over half assigned a rating that has been interpreted as "adequate" or "satisfactory." No "poor" or "very poor" ratings were issued. Forty percent found the community colleges doing a "good" job while 6% found a "very good" rating had been earned.

The highest means (averages) were to be found in the criteria "technical knowledge," "adaptability," and "motivation." Here the means were 3.7. "Work quality" was not far behind with a mean score 3.6. The two lowest average ratings, as in the case of the high schools, were in "written communication skills" and "oral communication

skills." Here the means were 3.2 and 3.3 respectively. No one gave the community college people a "very poor" rating on any given criteria. The mode was "good" in over half of the criteria. The range varied from 2–5 to 3–5. The ranking of assessment criteria from high to low, using the mean as the point of reference, are found in Chart 4.

Chart 4 Criteria Listed in Rank Order By Mean for Community College Hires: Highest to Lowest

Criteria	$\bar{X}$	Rank Order
Technical knowledge	3.7	1
Motivation	3.7	1
Adaptability	3.7	1
Work quality	3.6	2
Dependability	3.5	3
Overall rating	3.5	3
Safety consciousness	3.4	4
Work attitude	3.3	5
Oral communication skills	3.3	5
Written communication skills	3.3	5

Although the Employment Training Center (ETC) is an entity of the University of Hawai'i Community College system, the principal investigator thought it would be of value to ascertain the perceptions of the employers regarding ETC graduates they hire. It might be noted that even when the principal investigator talked to the employers, where there was documented evidence that an ETC graduate had been placed with their firms, human resource specialists were unfamiliar with the training backgrounds of the applicants. One ETC graduate was

believed to be a graduate of Hawai'i Pacific University. This may speak well for the ETC program. In any case, eight of the employers questioned were cognizant of the ETC and had hired people from the program (Table 13).

Table 13 Firms with Recent Experience with Employment Training Center (ETC) Graduates

Response	N	%
Firms with	8	16
Firms without	38	76
Firms that didn't know	4	8
Total	50	100

Of the eight who reported cognizance about hiring ETC graduates, over half reported that they had been employed for their documented expertise in "secretarial skills." This is found in Table 14. It is gratifying that, despite the small number who reported experience with the program, all reported that their experience had been "good" (Table 15).

Table 14 Business Education Areas Represented in Pre-Service Training of Successful ETC Applicants

Business Area	N
Accounting	0
Secretarial (Office Administration and Technology)	4
Computer Operator/Programmer	0
Marketing	0
Entry Level Management Skills	0
Other (Food Service [2], Facilities Maintenance [1])	3
Don't know	1
Total	8

Table 15 Adequacy of Employment Preparation of ETC Hires

Assessment	N	%
Good	8	16
Fair	0	0
Poor	0	0
Non-applicable or don't know if background of hire involved ETC training	42	84
Total	50	100

Other Relevant Data Collected and Findings

There is a set-aside provision in the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act of 1990 for funds for gender equity activities. The principal investigator felt that it would be of value to query employers regarding the status of gender equity in the workplace, especially as it applies to business education programs.

Eighty-two percent reported that it was their perception that the "playing" field had been leveled in this area and that access to occupational training was the same for both sexes (Table 16). Most of the 10% who responded "no" said women and girls were still disadvantaged. However, one respondent claimed that the pendulum had swung too far and that men and boys were now the targets of discrimination. It might be noted that most of the human resource people interviewed were women.

Table 16 Are Business Education Programs Serving Both Sexes Equally Well?

Response	N	%
Yes	41	82
No	5	10
No opinion	4	8
Total	50	100

Respondents were also asked if all training programs, particularly those in business education, were serving all cultural and ethnic groups equally. Eighty-eight percent of those responding to the question reported that every cultural/ethnic group was being given an equal shake (Table 17). Of the three who said that inequity exists, two said Caucasians were being discriminated against because of affirmative action. One said people of Filipino ancestry were treated unequally.

Table 17 Are Business Education Programs Serving All Cultural/Ethnic Groups Equally?

Response	N	%
Yes	44	88
No	3	6
No opinion	3	6
Total	50	100

Many people who seek to enroll in highly technical education programs offered at the community colleges find, to their dismay, that they lack the basic skills for successful participation. Poor language arts and math skills are frequently mentioned. Historically, community colleges have offered remedial courses to bring the basic skills of such students up to par. However, some people feel that remedial education should not be a function of the community colleges. Instead, they believe these students should enroll in remedial programs offered at the Community Schools for Adults within the Department of Education as the means for obtaining the necessary academic competence needed for community college success.

The employers in this survey were asked their opinion on this subject. Nearly three-fourths thought the community colleges should continue programs of remediation for this group (Table 18). The other fourth felt differently. However, a few did make exceptions for recent immigrants who lacked English language arts skills.

Table 18 Should Community Colleges Teach Remedial/ Developmental Subjects?

Response	N	%
Yes	37	74
No	12	24
No opinion	1	2
Total	50	100

It was determined that this survey could also provide information to teachers and counselors regarding the most prevalent recruiting practices for office occupations. Personnel directors were provided with a list of typical techniques and practices used to solicit applicants for position openings. They were also given *carte blanche* to offer techniques or strategies used by their organizations that were not included in the structured interview format (Table 19).

Every one of the fifty firms interviewed claimed they made extensive use of "word of mouth" and/or "referrals made by current employees" as major sources for recruiting. Eighty-four percent used newspaper advertisements. Over one-third of the respondents made use of a company recruiter who visited schools, colleges and job fairs. Less than one-fourth made use of school counselors or placement officers. Forty percent made use of the State Employment Office. However, only 7 firms made use of the pool of potential employees provided by the Job Training Partnership Act's (JTPA) training programs. Some made use of private employment firms or "headhunters" if they were seeking to fill a highly skilled positions or one that was unique. Most employers did not see recruiting as a substantial challenge in this period of economic stagnation.

Employers were asked if they required applicants to take an aptitude or skills test as part of the employment process. Over two-thirds reported they did not. Tests were most frequently used for positions requiring the handling of cash or a high level of keyboard

proficiency. Some firms did use tests that measured general business acumen. However, this was the exception and not the rule (Table 20).

Table 19 Resources and Techniques Used by Employers To Fill Vacancies

Resource/Technique Response	N	Yes H%	N	No H%	N	Don't Know H%	N	Total H
Newspaper advertisements	42	84	7	14	1	2	50	100
Company recruiter	19	38	31	62	6	0	50	100
School counselors and placement officers	12	24	38	76	0	0	50	100
Word of mouth	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
Referrals by present employees	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
JTPA	7	14	43	86	0	0	50	100
State employment office	20	40	30	10	0	0	50	100
Other (e.g. private employment firms, TIM, etc.)	10	20	40	80	0	0	50	100

Note: Most respondents use multiple techniques. Some just put "help wanted" signs or notices on bulletin boards. Others simply wait for potential applicants to introduce themselves.

Table 20 Firms Requiring Formal Testing for Employment or Entry Level Jobs

Nature of Response	N	%
Test required	18	36
No test required	32	64
Total	50	100

Note: Some require a test for advanced placement.

The firms that were interviewed reported relatively low levels of employee turnover. Some of the smaller firms had not hired new people in several years. The larger firms had a turn-over rate that approached 20% annually. Interestingly, few firms kept data on this and their responses were, admittedly, "guesstimates." As a consequence, this imprecise information has not been provided in tabular form.

Some of the businesses interviewed had as many as fifty or more written applications for each opening. They usually reduced the field for interview to between five to eight. The interview was cited as the most important factor in successful applications. References from former employers seemed to be of second most importance in the selection process. Rarely, did the human resource specialists consult transcripts or school records. A high school diploma was the minimum, formal education requirement in over 85% of the firms questioned (Table 21).

Table 21 Minimum Requirements Listed for Employment

Criteria	N	%
No requirement	2	4
High school diploma	43	86
Two year degree	2	4
Four year degree	1	2
Graduate work		
Relevant course work (difficult to define for most respondents. Probably no one would hire an accounts clerk without some formal preparation)	0	0
Work experience	2	4
Total	50	100

Hawai'i has one of the most diverse populations in terms of ethnicity and culture in the United States. Employers were asked if there were occasions when locally held cultural values came into conflict with their expectations of appropriate behavior in the modern workplace. Over half believed that such contradictions could and did exist (Table 22). However, most felt these conflicts could be resolved and that a person could behave in a manner consistent with the expectations of the workplace and still be true to his or her social values in informal, non-work oriented settings (Table 23). Four percent felt that such conflicts could not be resolved and twelve percent of the respondents had no opinion on the subject.

Table 22 Is There Any Clash Between Cultural Values Held by Some Groups In Hawai'i and the Expectations of the Workplace?

Response	N	%
Yes	26	52
No	18	36
No opinion	6	12
Total	50	100

Finally respondents were asked if there was a scarcity or surplus of applicants for skilled, office positions in today's economy. Over three-fourths of the human resource specialists expressed the belief that there was a surplus of applicants for job-entry level positions (Table 24). However, when the position required unique attributes or unusual requirements, there was some scarcity. Some people are disinclined to accept positions that require a lot of travel or the acquisition of unique skills that may have a low degree of transferability.

Table 23 Can Cultural Clashes Between Some Traditional Values and Workplace Expectations Be Resolved?

Response	N	%
Not applicable/ don't believe any conflicts exist	8	36
Yes/conflicts can be resolved	24	48
No/impractical for employees to do the necessary in-service	2	4
No opinion	6	12
Total	50	100

Note: Most employers who felt such conflicts existed, but could be resolved, preferred one-on-one counseling.

Table 24 Status of the Labor Market

Response	N	%
Surplus of applicants	38	76
Shortage in some positions and surplus in others with high skills qualifications	12	24
Total	50	100

Extemporaneous and Spontaneous Comments Offered

As was mentioned at the outset of this report, the survey involved a mix of "structured" and "open response" items. The preceding has largely centered on the responses involving items of the "structured" variety. Those participating in the survey were given an opportunity to comment or express some qualified response to an item or items at regular intervals. However, any relevant comment was recorded as it was offered. This resulted in a less structured pattern of feedback than might have been optimal. This informal feedback has been summarized in Appendices A and B. The comments have been organized in terms of the level of instruction to which the reference was primarily directed. However, as the reader will note, some comments or opinions tend to reflect on education, students, and employees in general. The reader should consult the appropriate appendices. Nevertheless, some discussion regarding these comments seem warranted.

Some of the comments covered more than one concern and many were lengthy in nature. Efforts were made to separate the content of the expressions of opinion that appeared mixed with statements of perceived fact. The comments were not recorded in a literal sense. Only the essence of the comment was recorded. A literal recording of the information would have resulted in an inordinately lengthy document.

The comments directed at high schools and persons whose occupational preparation was primarily obtained at the secondary level were nearly fifty in number. Some effort was made to categorize these comments. Understandably, there was a good deal of overlap. However, the comments fell roughly into four categories for "high school hires." The four general categories were as follows:

1) Suggestions for changes in curriculum content, instruction, and institutional procedures;

2) Assessments of the attributes of the students and potential high school hires;

3) Discussion of standards and/or objectives; and

4) Assessments of the influence of non-school variables.

In the first category there were suggestions for more vocational courses, spending more resources on the early school years and the use of practicum types of activities. Most wanted applicants to have some "work based experiences" before entering the job market. Many suggested expanding efforts at cooperative education and for programs that resembled youth apprenticeships. There was also a general consensus that the curriculum might be made more realistic in terms of what employers expect in job entry level positions. There was the feeling that many persons leaving high school, who needed to obtain employment on graduation, were not equipped with the right skills and attitudes. This general tone characterized about a third of all comments.

The second category was in many ways similar to the first. However, the focus was more directed at the applicants themselves. Employers expressed their dismay at the lack of interview skills of high school applicants. They reported applicants were not assertive enough, lacked organization in their personal presentations, and/or dressed inappropriately for the interview. There was the almost universal lament of the lack of written communication skills. This type of expression of sentiment was present in about half of all comments offered.

The third area of attention involved some consideration of the standards of the high schools. Employers generally wanted higher standards and expectations. Respondents often asserted that students would never perform better if the standards and expectations were not elevated. Many implied that the primary purpose of most students' attendance involved social considerations. They felt that basic preparation and mastery of necessary skills for the workplace should receive greater emphasis. About 8% of the comments dealt with this general issue.

The fourth basic type of comment involved some qualification of the respondents earlier criticism of the schools and their student products. Many employers acknowledged that the school and the students themselves are not fully to blame for perceived inadequacies. Some lamented the negative influence of the media and gangs. Others

acknowledged that other social units, such as the family, peers, and religious organizations, were not doing their part in the preparation of young people for the realities of life. This was the central focus of another 8% of the comments recorded.

There were not as many comments or suggestions offered about the community colleges. These extemporaneous expressions fell into three of the four categories used for the high school data. There was no discussion of the influence of other socialization agents, or the media on the performance of community college hires. This probably had something to do with the greater perceived maturity of community college hires.

In the first category of expressed opinion there were several unfavorable comparisons with the services being offered by the public community colleges, and those of the private business schools. In general, some employers felt that graduates of the private schools were more focused and the curricula more appropriate to the employers immediate needs. They also liked the placement services provided by the more expensive business colleges. They also felt that there should be more articulation with the business community's programs of in-service training.

In all fairness to the public community colleges, many of their office skills programs are organized with the purpose of producing a more rounded individual. They have also attempted to reach out to the business community by involving them, when possible, on advisory committees and the like.

This first category involved about two thirds of the comments volunteered.

The comments provided, which fell generally into the second category of expression, often had to deal with the lack of interpersonal skills. They saw a need for this, not only in presentations and other social interactions, but in the preparation of correspondence. This involved the content of about 27% of the observations offered.

As with the high schools, the employers said the community colleges ought to raise their expectations and standards. There was the general feeling that people will only rise to the minimal level of performance expected. Sentiments of this sort involved about 9% of the comments.

Again, the reader is urged to read the appendices to get a more precise and accurate perception of the general sentiments of the study population.

Summary and Conclusions

Many of the firms identified in the three lists provided to the principal investigator were not included in the sample as they had been interviewed for similar employer surveys in the recent past. However, fifty firms were included in the study. This was the most comprehensive and intensive effort of this sort conducted to date by the OSDVE.

The focus of this project was business or office occupational training programs. This is the single largest area of vocational studies, in terms of enrollment, at both the secondary and post secondary levels. Firms from the three lists were selected. The three lists identified firms most likely to hire persons with office skills, the largest firms in the state, and those firms that were known to have employed persons participating in community college sponsored programs, respectively. There was some, but not a great deal of difference in the overall response pattern of the three groups. Random selection of the firms was not appropriate for this study. While the "N" of 50 was the largest ever utilized for an employer satisfaction survey by the OSDVE, inferences beyond the sample are not advised.

Interviews, not phone or mailed solicitations, were used. Only two firms declined to be interviewed. In one case, the human resource specialists had only recently been hired. The second firm declined because of anonymity and confidentiality issues.

Most of the firms contacted provided some kind of service. About half had offices or representatives on the outer islands. More than four out of five firms reported having employed persons who received at least some of their office skills training during their high school years. Accounting, secretarial subjects, and computer applications were where most of the training took place.

Over 70% gave the high schools "adequate" or "good" ratings. In excess of 80% of the respondents reported that they would prefer to hire someone with high school skills training rather than high school graduates without relevant skills instruction. High school hires did best

in the areas of "motivation" and "safety awareness." They did poorest in the areas of "written communication skills" and "work attitude."

Almost 95% of the firms contacted had in their employ persons who had benefited from skills training provided by the community colleges. Accounting, secretarial subjects, and computer applications were the most popular areas for employment preparation. Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed gave the community colleges a "good" rating. The human resource specialists interviewed would prefer to hire someone with relevant skills training rather than someone with just a general education at that level. Persons who had attended a community college were rated highest in "technical knowledge," "work quality," and "motivation." They were rated lowest in "written communication skills."

Only about one in five of the personnel specialists had experience with the Employment Training Center program. This is understandable in light of that program's comparatively small size. Those who had hired ETC graduates were all favorably impressed with their training.

Over four of five of those in the sample said that occupational training programs in the state were serving both sexes equally well. They also felt that all cultural/ethnic groups were given a "fair shake" by an almost identical margin. Nearly three out of four interviewed felt the community colleges should provide remediation in basic skills when necessary. However, many were scornful of people who had wasted their high school years.

All firms rely on referrals from current employees and "word of mouth" in the recruitment. Over four out of five use newspaper advertisements to attract candidates for employment. Less than one in five require a test of any sort in the application process. The job interview and references are the principal criteria in the employment process. For job entry level positions, over 85% require a high school diploma as the minimum educational level.

Most respondents reported that there is an occasional clash between traditional cultural values and the expectations of the workplace. However, most feel that these differences can be accommodated. And, at the present time there is a surplus of applicants for job entry, office skills jobs.

There was a good deal of continuity between this and earlier, similar studies. Employers are still as disappointed with the language arts skills of applicants as they were fifteen years ago. However, they

are in general pleased with the technical preparation of applicants. If an applicant says he or she can perform a given technical task they usually can. The workplace, particularly the office workplace, is an ever-changing environment. Technical advances in communications, information retrieval, and analytical tools are growing at geometric, not arithmetical, rates. Applicants for the office workplace should be prepared to learn continuously. They need a strong background in basic skills but also need to be exposed to technology in high school and be proficient in its use.

Appendix A

Comments Offered By Respondents Regarding High School Hires

Comments Offered Regarding High School Hires

- Offer courses in psychology.
- High school graduates are weak in written and oral communication skills.
- Make the curriculum more focused.
- Counseling is poor at present.
- We prefer to do our own training.
- More vocational courses.
- Spend your money on grades 1–3.
- Schools need to teach more "people skills."
- Most high school graduates don't interview well.
- High school applicants should be more concerned with their physical appearance.
- We look for some experience.
- Provide a curriculum at the secondary level similar to Heald Business College.
- Schools can't handle anything but the average student. Their programs for the academically disadvantaged and gifted are poor.
- Less rote learning—more problem solving.
- Peer group and family are more important in achievement than the schools themselves. The teachers can only do so much. If a student doesn't want to be in school, there is only so much a teacher can do.
- Better communications and interview skills—their technical skills are good.
- Applicants need "cash handling" experience.
- Need to be at the forefront of office automation.
- A "proof operator" requires incredible patience and concentration.
- Internships would be good—students should get academic credit.
- Schools need to instill in students a love of life long learning. It simply is reality. In today's business office, you need to be constantly adjusting and learning new techniques.

Comments Offered Regarding High School Hires

- Corporate America is good at demolishing people. You need to be strong.
- More business-related courses are necessary.
- Need to emphasize the requirements for good customer service.
- Schools should teach students how to deal with the public.
- There needs to be more emphasis in communications skills.
- Schools need to be active in building relations with the business community.
- Students need a dose of reality.
- More cooperative education would be good.
- We need more applicants with demonstrated skill.
- We only hire 1 out of every 50 applicants.
- More cooperative education opportunities are necessary.
- Schools need to actively solicit more input from business.
- Need to teach attitudes and interpersonal skills.
- Families are increasingly unable to perform their traditional function.
- The situation in the public schools is reasonable given the fact that family influence has decreased. It is too bad that both parents have to work one, and even take on two jobs.
- Programs like cooperative education don't necessarily teach academic skill, but they do teach "job awareness."
- Graduates still lack communication skills.
- Improve test scores—your image is hurt by newspaper articles.
- Improve quality of teacher—pay more to assure quality.
- Teach the basics—in the advanced grades, they don't know the fundamentals.
- More emphasis on basics like English and math.
- Teachers can't do the job of a parent.
- Improve discipline.
- Teach more interpersonal skills.
- Need good telephone skills and customer service awareness.

Comments Offered Regarding High School Hires

- They tend to have a lack of discipline.
- Not adequately motivated.
- Not aggressive about seeking skilled employment.
- Treat the teachers better—teachers in this state are not as well treated as they are in Minnesota.
- Poor English language skills—this must improve if they are to be competitive.
- There should be more focus on reading, writing, and other communications skills.
- Graduates have poor English and interpersonal skills.
- Products of the public schools don't understand the prevalent mainland culture. Disneyland and Las Vegas do not represent the mainland.
- Teach them the basics.
- Insist on the use of standard English.
- Have more writing activities.
- Provide students with more exposure to the mainland culture.
- They need an attitude that says "I'm prepared to work."
- Need better technical business skills—knowing how to use a typewriter, calculator, and/or computer is not enough.
- More practical experience in actual job settings is necessary before they leave school.
- Kahuku High School has improved markedly over the last few years.
- Raise standards. The 2.0 criterion for participation in extra curricular activities is too low.

Appendix B

Comments Offered by Respondents Regarding Community College Hires

Comments Offered Regarding Community College Hires

- Improve interpersonal skills and the ability to work independently.
- We need people with common sense.
- We prefer to do our own training—its more relevant and to the point.
- Offer a curriculum equivalent to the better private business colleges.
- Make it easier to register.
- The registration at KCC is a mess. I tried to register for a course and gave up.
- Stress cooperative education, internships, and practicums.
- We use the community colleges for in-services—however, we have an extensive in-house training program as well.
- Our company has had extensive experience in the Corporation Hawai'i Program.
- Course work in the business area needs to be more applicable to the real world.
- Honolulu Community College has some good programs.
- The community colleges need to "market" their students better.
- More industry experiences should be incorporated into the curriculum.
- Windward Community College needs a broader curriculum. There are not enough occupational subjects. They spent too much time in Hawaiiana things.
- Keep up the good work.
- Students who go on to the community colleges simply seem to do better.
- Courses need to be offered more frequently—students sometimes have to wait a semester or more for a class they need for their major or occupational program.
- Students need to be more assertive.
- Improve interpersonal skills.
- Work on communication skills.
- Get back to basics.

Comments Offered Regarding Community College Hires

- Work on attitude.
- More cooperative education on similar practicum experiences.
- The colleges need more money to be more effective.
- Interpersonal skills are paramount.
- Communication skills, both oral and written, are weak.
- More "work practicum" activities are needed while they are in school.
- More emphasis on English writing skills, which are sorely lacking at all levels (high school, community college, and university). Deficiencies in these areas are causing great difficulty for those who wish to move up within the organization.
- Teach them to write business correspondence.
- Teach them to work independently, not in groups.
- Make all familiar with the rudiments of computer operations.
- Student graduates have poor conversational skills.
- They reflect insular thinking.
- Teach them to write business letters and work "independently."
- Raise standards and sharpen organizational objectives.
- Improve job placement procedures—the private business colleges do a far better job in this area.
- There are no initiatives from college people in the area of placement.

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